

IN THE CLAIMS:

1-19. (cancelled)

20. (previously presented) A method for stabilizing a first stack of upper and lower shipping containers with respect to an adjacent second stack of upper and lower shipping containers, comprising the steps of:

connecting a plurality of inter-box connectors to each lower container;

placing at least one container bridging stabilizer having a single inter-box connector receiving aperture only around two adjacent ones of said inter-box connectors when the lower containers are laterally adjacent each other to laterally link the two adjacent inter-box connectors and their respective adjacent lower containers together, both of said adjacent inter-box connectors being positioned in said single inter-box connector receiving aperture; and

lowering the respective upper containers onto the respective lower containers and locking the respective upper and lower containers vertically together with the inter-box connectors.

21. (currently amended) A method for stabilizing a first stack of upper and lower shipping containers with respect to an adjacent second stack of upper and lower shipping containers, comprising the steps of:

connecting a plurality of inter-box connectors to each lower container;

placing at least one container bridging stabilizer around two adjacent ones of said inter-box connectors when the lower containers are laterally adjacent each other to laterally link the two adjacent inter-box connectors and their respective adjacent lower containers together;

lowering the respective upper containers onto the respective lower containers and locking the respective upper and lower containers vertically together with the inter-box connectors; and

each of the inter-box connectors having rotatable upper and lower locking elements and wherein the inter-box connectors are connected to the lower containers by at least one of pulling out a cord and manually rotating the lower locking element of the connectors to fit the lower locking element to a respective corner locking aperture of the ~~bottom~~ lower containers when the respective ~~top~~ upper container is lowered onto the respective lower container, the respective upper locking element automatically rotating as a respective corner locking aperture of the respective ~~top~~ upper container interacts with the respective upper locking element.

22. (currently amended) The method of claim 20 comprising the step of providing two of said container bridging stabilizers, and placing each of the respective container bridging stabilizers around two respective adjacent ones of said inter-box connectors to laterally link them together at laterally spaced apart locations along an upper edge at a top of each of the lower containers.

23. (previously presented) The method of claim 20 including the step of placing the ~~two~~ lower shipping containers in a well of a rail car adjacent each other laterally in an end-to-end configuration.

24. (previously presented) The method according to claim 20 including the step of providing said upper and lower shipping containers as approximately 20' long containers.

25. (currently amended) A method for stabilizing a first stack of upper and lower shipping containers with respect to an adjacent second stack of upper and lower shipping containers, comprising the steps of:

connecting a plurality of inter-box connectors to each lower container;

placing at least one container bridging stabilizer around two adjacent ones of said inter-box connectors when the lower containers are laterally adjacent each other to laterally link the two adjacent inter-box connectors and their respective adjacent lower containers together;

lowering the respective upper containers onto the respective lower containers and locking the respective upper and lower containers vertically together with the inter-box connectors[[:]]; and

placing the lower containers laterally adjacent each other on a surface on which they are to be shipped, and with a container spreader tool, adjusting a lateral spacing between the adjacent lower shipping containers so that the bridging stabilizer will fit around the two adjacent inter-box connectors.

26. (currently amended) The method according to claim 25 including the step of providing the container spreader tool with a ratchet housing and a handle and wherein operation of the handle drives respective adjusting screws connected to respective engagement ~~numbers~~ members received in ovals at a side of said laterally adjacent lower containers.

27. (cancelled)

28. (currently amended) A method for stabilizing a first stack of upper and lower shipping containers with respect to an adjacent second stack of upper and lower shipping containers, comprising the steps of:

providing a plurality of connectors for connecting the upper and lower containers of each stack;

providing a bridging stabilizer having at least one container spacer projecting from said bridging stabilizer;

connecting the plurality of connectors to the lower containers;

placing the bridging stabilizer at two adjacent ones of said plurality of connectors when the lower containers are laterally adjacent each other to laterally link ~~the~~ said two adjacent ones of said plurality of connectors; and

lowering the respective upper container[[s]] of the first stack onto the ~~respective two~~ lower container[[s]] of the first stack and lowering the upper container of the second stack onto the lower container of the second stack, and locking the upper and lower containers of the first and second stacks vertically together with the plurality of connectors, said at least one container spacer being located in a gap between the first and second stacks.

29. (currently amended) A method of claim 28 wherein said bridging stabilizer has two of said container spacers, one of said spacers being an upper container spacer projecting up from said bridging stabilizer and the other one of said spacers being a lower container spacer projecting down from said bridging stabilizer, and wherein the upper container spacer is located in said gap between the upper shipping containers and the lower container spacer being located in said gap between the lower shipping containers.

30. (previously presented) A method of claim 28 wherein the bridging stabilizer has a single connector receiving aperture only and the two adjacent connectors are both located within said single connector receiving aperture.

31. (previously presented) A method of claim 30 wherein said single connector receiving aperture has two projections, with each projection defining a respective region for receiving a respective one of said two adjacent connectors.